

Trials of a New PC Officer

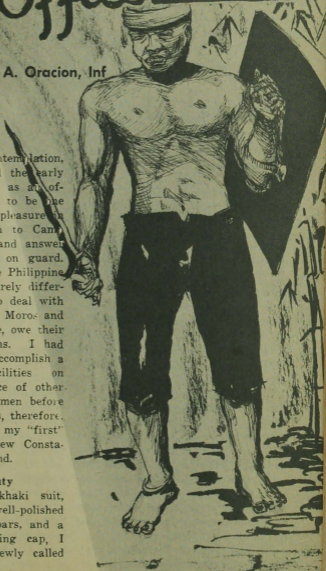
By First Lt. Lossiete A. Oracion, Inf



In moments of contemplation, I blush to recall the early years of my life as an officer. It was a novelty to be one then. I sensed childish pleasure in shuttling back and forth to Camp Murphy just to receive and answer the salutes of the MPs on guard. But my assignment to the Philippine Constabulary was an entirely different experience. I was to deal with a new social group — the Moros and politicians who, unlike me, owe their positions through elections. I had to think like a lawyer, accomplish a mission with limited facilities on hand, and, in the absence of other officers, consult enlisted men before making decisions. This is, therefore, a recollection of some of my "first" adventures as a brand-new Constabulary officer in Moroland.

Reporting for Duty

With freshly-pressed khaki suit, shining belt buckle, well-polished shoes, glittering golden bars, and a twenty-seven peso Pershing cap, I looked like an officer newly called





As a new officer, I found it a most pleasurable experience shuffling back and forth to Murphy just because I receive the salutes of the MPs on guard. It was childish, but at the same time it gave me a feeling of importance.

to active duty which, indeed, I was. I had just completed a special company officers' course in Fort McKinley and I was on my way to report to the Personnel Officer (G-1), 4th Military Area, Mindanao, for assignment.

The Personnel Officer was a fatherly lieutenant colonel who answered my regulation salute with a non-regulation one. After I presented my transfer orders, he smiled and said, "You will enjoy your new assignment. It has been made famous by music in the grades." I understood what he meant three days later when special orders assigning me to the 1st Zamboanga PC Company stationed at Pagadian, Zamboanga was placed on my lap.

Area Briefing

Before I left for my new station, I was directed to report to the different sections of the Area Headquarters for last-minute briefing. Since my new assignment was in the PC, I reported to the Deputy Area Commander for PC Affairs, a veteran Moro fighter. It was from him that I heard that "the only good Moro is a dead Moro." I knew of its falsity very much later.

In the intelligence section (G-2), a captain incessantly drummed into my head to report anything that happens in my area no matter how trifling it was. I was itching to know the extent of "anything trifling" but I didn't want to create an impression of ignorance so I kept it

to myself. The administrative officer of G-3 section wanted me to remind my new commanding officer that reports on encounters should be submitted promptly. My transportation order was withheld by the transportation officer until my submission of clearance papers. Although I reasoned out that I did not receive a single item from the Area, he stopped me by saying, "That's camp regulations. You've got to present your Area clearance even if you haven't taken anything." One purpose of such clearance became clear when the treasurer of the 4th Military Area Officers' Club refused to affix his signature unless I fork over a five peso membership fee.

New Station

The unit to which I was assigned had one of the cleanest camps. The nicest thing about it, however, was its proximity to a college which had pretty Zamboangeña students. Visiting them after dusk was, to my bachelor's way of thinking, a coveted diversion for a PC officer.

However, my enthusiasm was dampened upon learning from my commanding officer that I was going to be detailed to the company's detachment in Malangas, a town inaccessible except by a full twelve-hour travel by launch. A boat was leaving the next day and it was necessary that I take it as schedules were irregular. Sometimes, Malangas was by-passed weeks at a time, especially during bad weather. Before I left, however, I met the provincial commander. He briefed me on conditions in my area and ended it with, "I expect you to repair the

barracks and the officers' quarters there. The last time I inspected that camp, I fell in the bathroom."

At Detachment Headquarters

The detachment headquarters was located on elevated ground with a commanding view of Dumanquilas Bay. While the enlisted men's barracks looked dilapidated, the officers' quarters seemed nice. Upon inspection of the bathroom, I saw a few pieces of wood of what was once the floor. I could still discern an imprint of a big foot, probably that of my provincial commander when he fell.

The only strongly-constructed room was the detention cell in the guardhouse which was made of iron bars. I had in mind that it was built so for hardened Moro criminals, but upon inquiry, the detachment sergeant remarked that the most frequent detainees were the drunks who used to throw stones at the Chinese stores. Moros seldom get imprisoned because they prefer to fight it out to the death with the PC men.

A full-strength PC company was formerly stationed in the same place but after the "streamlining of the PC," only a detachment remained. I was commander of a detachment of exactly seven men with one man permanently detailed with the Malangas Coal Mines, thirty kilometers away, to account for the explosives. My operational area included three towns unconnected by roads and separated by thick jungles. The sea was the main link of the three municipalities. Since the detachment had neither outboard motor nor bot-

toms, the only recourse during water patrols was either to borrow or commandeer available Moro boats called "vintas."

I boarded with a family who never had any officer-boarder before. When I asked the old woman whether thirty pesos a month would be enough, she replied that she could serve me three courses with it if I

come that he has two families?" I asked in disbelief. The soldier explained, "Well, sir, some people around here have as much as five wives." I should have known better that Moros are allowed to practice polygamy. Although the mayor was a Christian, he had adopted the native customs and idiosyncracies so that nobody thought it odd.



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appreciate chicken and fish menus. I felt as if I was cheating her so I added a few pesos.

Courtesy Call

Following regulations, I went to the municipal mayor's residence to pay a courtesy call, accompanied by an enlisted man. But on the threshold, a boy told me that the mayor was with his other family. "How

Invitation to a Moro Wedding

One Sunday morning the sergeant of the guard reported that a certain Moro datu had been waiting in the office for more than an hour to see me. I was about to let the datu come to my quarters but when I glanced in the direction of the guardhouse I saw not only one Moro but a whole crowd. On second thought I decided to wear my pistol and see

the datu alone. The sergeant, however, anticipating my line of thinking, apprised me that the rest are not warriors but members of the datu's family who want to shake hands with me. I shot a questioning glance and he continued, "Usually, sir, when a new officer arrives, they make a sort of courtesy call so that if the officer comes upon them during patrols, the handshaking aids in recognition."

After an introduction and so much handshaking, I found out that the datu speak Visaya. With this discovery the datu became more intimate and before he left, he invited me to attend the wedding of his son in the barrio. Perplexed by the problem of accepting or rejecting the invitation, I called an old PC soldier who had spent the best years of his life in Moroland. He opined that since a Moro's pride easily gets hurt I would have a hard time winning a Moro's friendship again if I lose it. After a little reflection on my seven-man strength, I suddenly realized that I needed friendship more than hostility. I promised the datu that I was going.

On the day of the wedding, I had only one man available for patrol. Again I consulted my old sergeant about the possibility of an ambush. I felt that I was too young to have a street named after me should I become a casualty. The advice, in brief, was that the only way to gain the respect and admiration of the Moros was to show them courage. If they would know that I did not make good my promise because of fear

then they would be emboldened to disrupt the existing peace and order. I decided to proceed, hoping that the sergeant was right.

The Moro datu met me with sounding gongs and I actually noticed their high esteem when they seated me in line with the other datus. During the ceremony some of the Moro girls snickered when I refused to receive a five-peso bill handed to me. The datu explained that it was customary for every datu to receive monetary gifts during weddings and I was, to their point of view, a ranking one. On my return to camp, I smiled inwardly when my soldier-escort related that the Moros thought I ranked higher than my predecessor (a first lieutenant) because of my golden bars. Fond of jewelry, Moros know that gold is more precious than silver.

First Case In Court

My first case in court, surprisingly enough, was not murder as I expected, but bribery. The person charged was, of all people, the chief of police of the town. With the guidance of my investigating sergeant, I decided to file the case in court with the person involved as my star witness. But on the day set by the local justice of the peace for the trial, my star witness disappeared. I asked for postponement but the witness simply couldn't be found. The case was dismissed for lack of sufficient evidence. It was only many years later that I learned the reason for the disappearing act. The chief returned the bribe money with one hundred per cent interest on condi-

tion that the witness hide in the forest.

First Pirate Attack

One night, a wet, shoeless, shotgun-toting individual, introducing himself as the mayor of one of the towns under my jurisdiction, brought the news that a Chinese family residing in one of his barrios was robbed and killed by Moro pirates using a Moro launch called "kumpit." I mobilized a maximum patrol strength of three PC soldiers and sped to the scene of the crime in a tugboat lent to the mayor by the Hercules Lumber Company. Luckily, the local judge of the town concerned was a hunter by avocation. Incensed by the daylight piracy, he volunteered to go with us and use his .22 caliber rifle in hunting the pirates.

While at sea, we were notified that the mastermind was still hiding in one of the island-barrios near the scene of the crime. I consulted the judge whether he could issue a search warrant at once. He answered in the affirmative. One hour later, we fanned around the barrio and the manhunt was on. It was in one secluded hut that a Moro swinging a "barong" (a Moro bladed weapon) charged from the doorway. Fortunately, my man who was the target sidestepped and the barong missed his ear by a few inches. A concentrated fire from the rest of the patrol fell the "juramentado." Upon inspection of the body, I found a small bundle wrapped in black cloth hanging down the renegade's chest. "That's an 'anting-anting,'" whispered a policeman. "It endows

them with super-human courage to defy the PC without firearms." (An "anting-anting" is a Moro good luck charm).

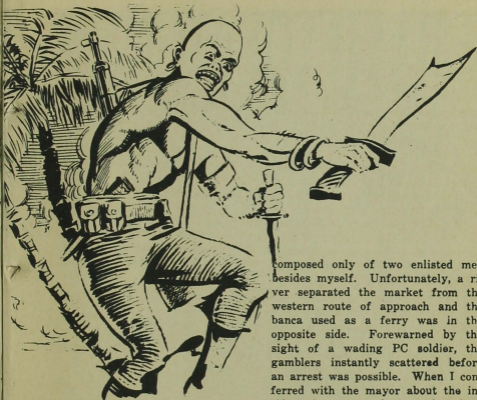
With the death of this Moro, the rest of the natives felt free to talk about the Moro pirates and pointed to the deceased as the mastermind of the crime. Having verified the information that the perpetrators left for Jolo, I flashed a radio message to provincial headquarters to request PC Jolo to intercept them.

First Police Inspection

A week after the pirate attack, a letter arrived from the company headquarters directing me to inspect the police force at once. I felt certain qualms when I overheard that the chief of police of the town I was going to inspect was already a first lieutenant at the time I was still in short pants. But the order was there and I could not think of a way to evade it. The actual inspection proved to be an opportunity for me to demonstrate the latest drill regulations. I was comforted with the fact that my army training was not entirely useless in the PC. I finished the inspection after noting down the following: (a) only one policeman knew how to prepare a sworn statement, and (b) small town policemen are one of the lowest paid government employees.

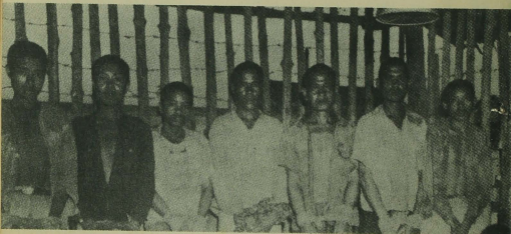
First Gambling Raid

While I was on routine patrol duty, an old man volunteered the information that a form of gambling locally called "hantak" was being played right in the public market of a nearby town where a fiesta was



being celebrated. I asked whether he reported the matter to the police and he replied that since the new mayor was sworn into office, the police force was no longer what it used to be. (I learned later that the informant was a rabid leader of the defeated mayor). Immediately, I briefed my men on a two-point attack, one PC soldier to approach from the west while another from the east. Actually, the patrol was

composed only of two enlisted men besides myself. Unfortunately, a river separated the market from the western route of approach and the banca used as a ferry was in the opposite side. Forewarned by the sight of a wading PC soldier, the gamblers instantly scattered before an arrest was possible. When I conferred with the mayor about the incident, he requested me to let alone the gambling games, otherwise, he would not be able to meet the Red Cross quota. It came out that the gambling operator promised to back up the quota for the whole town in return for a three-day uninterrupted operation. Angrily, I addressed the mayor with the following words: "Mr. Mayor, it is the duty of servants of the people like us to uphold the majesty of the law. We should not allow anybody to break it even it is for a noble cause like the Red Cross. I am sorry, Mayor, but I will not be a party to such deal-



Here are Moro inmates in the municipal jail. Notice the light materials employed. This jail is only good for drunken Moros, not juramentados who would rather fight it out to the end with the authorities.

ings." With that I turned my back but even before I could take a few steps the mayor grabbed my arm and invited me to be his guest for the duration of the fiesta. Before I could refuse, he explained that my presence would really prevent the re-occurrence of the vice. He said that he was really against it, but could not enforce the law due to the pressure of his gambling "compadres" who supported him during the elections. He was sure that the gamblers would not make another proposition with my presence in his house. The barbed words I spontaneously mouthed did not exactly come as a surprise. They were the warning words uttered by my provincial commander when he briefed me in Pagadian.

Back to School

Two months after I assumed com-

mand of the Malangas PC Detachment, my radio operator received a radiogram ordering me to proceed immediately to the Philippine Constabulary School in Camp Crame, Quezon City for training in criminal investigation. A launch was leaving the next morning so I barely had time to prepare. But by this time I had learned many things from subordinates, especially from a Jolo soldier who used to make a terse remark: "Oldel is oldel" when others grudgingly follow instructions. (Joloanos, by the way, have a hard time pronouncing the letter "r" so they use "l" instead.)

I knew that going to school would be my chance to become a better PC officer. Although experience is a good teacher, one commits fewer mistakes and consults less in making decisions when the proper way is learned in school.